



Defining Your Stakeholders

A quick guide to defining and positioning stakeholders for organisations and projects

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Stakeholder definition is important at a variety of different levels in your organisation or project. Whether you are carrying out a strategic review, a post project audit or designing applications, it is important to know who influences (or is influenced by), has an impact on the outcome or is affected by your project.

Identifying stakeholders

This can be done individually but it often more powerful when carried out as a group process. The power of a group brainstorm can that the information you have goes much deeper. It is also useful to consider that there might be disagreement amongst individual as to the the roles and influence of others. This could occur for many reasons, including a lack of knowledge, limited exposure to a wider audience or organisation or even failing to legitimate the role of some people or groups for political or power reasons. When this definition is carried out amongst a broad group it has the potential to lead to a more accurate, neutral and more widely accepted outcome. It is also likely to inform the group's own knowledge.

Audience Mapping

Wairua Consulting has developed the AudienceMap™ as a fast and effective way of visually representing stakeholders and their relationships to each other and the system, project, process or organisation.

The audience map works through a visual metaphor of concentric circles that identify relationships that exist at four levels:

Direct	People or groups who directly interact with the project.
Indirect	People or groups who do not directly interact with the project but exercise strong influence over (or are strongly influenced/affected by) direct users.
Remote	People or groups who remain at a distance from the project but could be affected/influenced by the project (or vice versa, could indirectly influence).
Societal	Wider societal influences. Usually macro, they have no direct impact or influence and are themselves either not affected by or very indirectly affected by the system. This might include legislators or local authorities, quality assurance agencies or professional governing

bodies and typical refers to a marco level change or rule, law or policy has a trickle-down impact on this project.

Creating the Audience Map

Draw the Audience Map outline on a whiteboard, use an OHP or electronic template. You will now have three concentric circles, the innermost is labelled “direct”, moving outwards to “indirect” and “remote” and the layer outside the final circle is “societal”. This now visually represents distance from project (the closer to the middle, the closer to the project).

Brainstorm

Ask the group to suggest stakeholders and nominate where they belong. At this stage, take a brainstorming approach and don't query or challenge. Simply write them in the nominated area. You could at this stage focus on one category at a time, in particular it is often easier to start with the “direct” stakeholders as they tend to be the more obvious and more readily drawn to mind. This can act as a warm-up for the rest of the process. The brainstorming phase tends to last between 10 and 15 minutes but could be more or less.

Review

Once you've reached what feels like saturation point and no more new stakeholders are coming through, start to refine the process. Do this by getting the group to work through the stakeholders and confirm that they are happy with where they've been put, you're aiming for group consensus here and, given that this model is always subjective, this can be more important than absolute accuracy. Work from the centre outwards.

You can also use this phase to merge entries and remove any duplication.

Relate

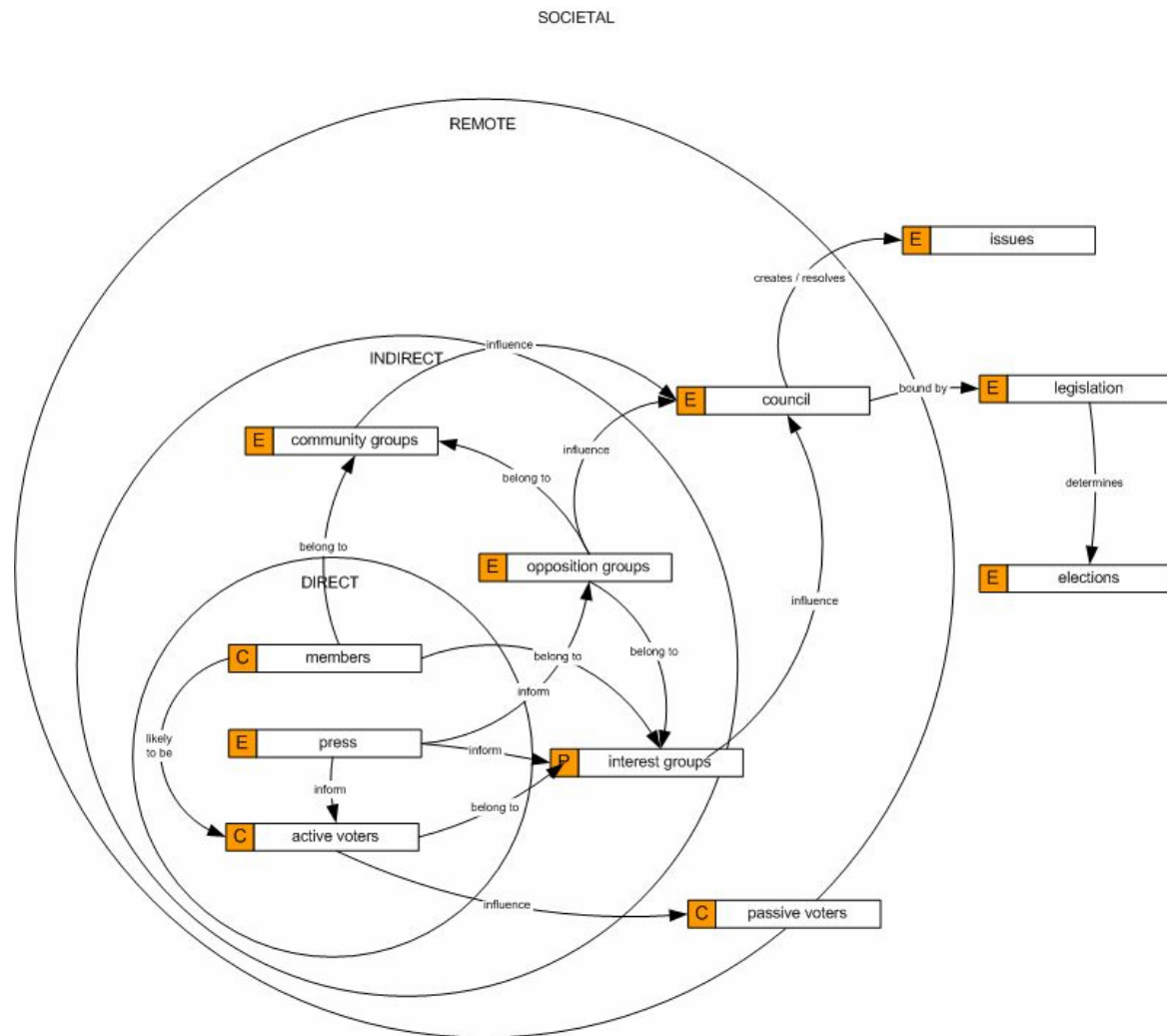
Now that you have the basic list of stakeholders in the right place, try relating them to each other. Primary relationships can usually be found to exist between stakeholders in neighbouring circles and within circles (especially the innermost “direct” group).

You can describe the relationship that exists (and the direction it flows) if you wish.

The Finished Product

Once this session has been completed you will hopefully know who your stakeholders are, how strongly they affect/influence or are affected/influenced by the project. You might also now know the key relationships that exist between stakeholders.

The end-result of this process is a graphical representation of the stakeholder community by way of an AudienceMap™. The example that follows is a real audience map of a local political organisation. Remember this is not meant to be exhaustive or generic, it is intended to give the client, key stakeholders and the project team a clear and (most importantly) shared understanding of the project's stakeholders:



Stakeholders Defined

A visual representation of the project's stakeholders might be enough. If you need to drill down further to define more information on stakeholders, the following model is recommended.

This is a simple text-based table of stakeholders defining who they are, who they influence and are influenced by and a definition of their role and potential impact in relation to the project. The example below takes a sub-set of the AudienceMap™ above by way of an example:

Stakeholder	Influences/Affects	Influenced/ Affected by	Description of role
Party members	Other members Active voters Interest groups	Active voters Press Interest groups	Party members are the key project workers for the campaign. At this level of granularity, it includes candidates.
Active votes	Party members Passive voters Interest groups	Press Party members	This describe the section of the community who are actively informed regarding local body politics.

You can see from this that relationships can exist one or both ways and that a single stakeholder can be both influenced and an influencer. In many ways, complex circular relationships can exist. Influence often moving outwards through the layers of the AudienceMap™ only to return to the centre through the influences of other groups.

Relationships

Now that you understand who your audience is in some detail, the final step that you might want to consider is to map these stakeholders to key project, system or organisational activities, processes or functional areas. The usefulness of this rather in-depth process will depend on what you are trying to achieve. In many cases, you will already be well enough informed. This process is perhaps more useful in the more micro-projects, such as development, it is less likely that you will need this level of granularity if you are assessing the strategic planning function.

The purpose of this process is to identify the intentionality of your stakeholders. You are in effect mapping business (or system) objectives to the needs of the key stakeholders. This will help you to focus the project deliverables and scope in terms of relevance to the stakeholders. Consider also that up until this point your definition of stakeholders has been at a high level. You have not considered that influence and affect could ebb and flow at different stages of a project or in different areas of that project. The relationship map allows you to identify the intensity and chronology of a stakeholder relationship.

PROCESS/ ACTIVITY	STAKEHOLDER			
	CEO	Director	IT Manager	Networks manager
Business strategy	Leads process Owner	Governance Participant Key influencer	Influencer, not directly involved.	-
IT Strategy	Key influencer	-	Leads process Owner	Participant
Network plan	-	-	Influencer	Owner



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